

Highland Park, IL - Concerned that Fort Sheridan's bluffs could fall victim to high-rise developers, Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) held a press conference Monday morning announcing he won House approval for the Navy to transfer its ownership of key Lake Michigan bluffs to an environmental trust. Joining Kirk at the press conference were Highland Park Mayor Michael Belsky, Openlands Associate Director Joyce O'Keefe, and Lake Forest Open Lands Executive Director Stephen Bartram. The bluffs, located at the southern end of Fort Sheridan, are home to several endangered species.

"By acting forcefully now, we will preserve a key habitat located on Lake Michigan's shoreline for the permanent enjoyment of the public," said Kirk. "I want to thank the Navy for working with the Open Lands Association and recognizing the need to preserve the open space for the public right on Lake Michigan's shoreline."

Kirk forged a partnership between the Navy and the Open Lands Association to preserve the bluffs and beaches. During a tour of the bluffs, Kirk outlined the proposed boundaries of the new Lake Michigan park and highlighted the endangered species to be protected on the lake's shoreline.

"Only 60 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline exists within Illinois," said Kirk. "Most of that land is privately controlled. This new park to protect the bluffs will be one of the only original Lake Michigan shoreline habitats open to the public."

Kirk's legislation was part of the Department of Defense Authorization bill (H.R. 4200) passed by the House of Representatives. Pending approval in the Senate, the transfer of the bluffs could be complete by next year. Under the House legislation, Open Lands would cover the \$125,000 cost to survey the boundaries of the park.